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August 25, 1998

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XC: Mark Subbotion Ken Moch - empact Sciences 9/11/98

Mr. Doug Krofta
U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
2730 Loker Avenue West
Carlsbad, CA 92008

Re: Results of Focused California Gnatcatcher Surveys for the West Creek/East Creek Project Site, Valencia, Los Angeles County

Dear Mr. Krofta:

This letter report summarizes the methodology and findings of surveys for the coastal California gnatcatcher (*Polioptila californica californica*) conducted by **Planning Consultants Research (PCR)** at the subject site. The surveys were conducted to determine the presence and distribution or absence of the coastal California gnatcatcher within the project site.

STUDY AREA

The project site is located in Los Angeles County generally within San Francisquito Canyon just upstream of its confluence with the Santa Clara River (Figure 1). As shown on a U.S. Geological Survey topographic map, the site lies within the Newhall U.S.G.S. 7.5 minute quadrangle (see Figure 2). The project site elevation ranges from 1,100 feet above mean sea level to 1,500 feet above mean sea level.

The overall project site encompasses 1,297 acres. Of this total suitable California gnatcatcher habitat represented by coastal sage scrub and coastal sage/chaparral scrub, cover 65.4 acres. PCR conducted California gnatcatcher surveys over the entire 65.4-acre scrub habitat. Specifically, this included all habitat potentially supporting California gnatcatchers that will be directly or indirectly affected by the physical impacts of the project.

VEGETATION

Vegetation within the overall project area includes various riparian formations, agricultural fields, non-native grassland, and scrub communities.

Low hills along the eastern margin of East Creek support coastal sage scrub and chaparral vegetation of varying species compositions and densities. There are few "pure" stands of either vegetation type on the remaining slopes, most areas being ecotonal between the two plant community

233 WILSHIRE BOULEVARD, SUITE 130 SANTA MONICA, CALIFORNIA 90401 TEL 310 451-4488 FAX 310 451-5279 E-MAIL: PCR@lpt.net

ONE VENTURE, SUITE 150 IRVINE, CALIFORNIA 92618 TEL 949 753-7001 FAX 949 753-7002 E-MAIL: PCR2@IDT.NET

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types. The most common coastal sage scrub taxa are California buckwheat (Eriogonum fasciculatum), California sagebrush (Artemisia californica), our Lord's candle (Yucca whipplei), purple sage (Salvia leucophylla), black sage (Salvia mellifera), and deerweed (Lotus scoparius), while chaparral elements present include chamise (Adenostoma fasciculatum), redberry (Rhamnus ilicifolia), toyon (Heteromeles arbutifolia), squaw bush (Rhus trilobata), and scrub oak (Quercus dumosa). Ground cover within and between shrubs consists of annual grasses, with non-native and native herbaceous taxa intermixed. Common non-native species include mustard species (Brassica sp.), red-stem filaree (Erodium cicutarium), tocalote (Centaurea melitensis), barley (Hordeum sp.), brome grasses (Bromus sp.), and slender wild oats (Avena barbata). Native annual wildflowers include strigose lotus (Lotus strigosus), several lupine species (Lupinus sp.), fiddleneck (Amsinckia sp.), mariposa lilies (Calochortus sp.), golden yarrow (Eriophyllum lanatum), elegant clarkia (Clarkia unguiculata), popcorn flower (Plagiobothrys nothofulvus), and chia sage (Salvia columbariae). Patches of native melic grass (Melica sp.) and nodding needlegrass (Nassella cernua) occur sporadically within the coastal scrub areas.

Slopes, canyons, and ridgelines along the eastern portion of West Creek are essentially the same as those remnants on East Creek, but they are relatively intact geologically, having been graded only around the toes of the slopes for agriculture, and along access roadways and fuel breaks. The inner basin of the central-most drainage (exiting to Rye Canyon) contains an archery course, with access road, parking, lightly-graded paths, a staging area and course pads. There also was some random slope damage from heavy equipment on the inner ridgelines above the archery course. Most of the hills on West Creek were control-burned in 1997.

A few of the lowest south-facing slopes on West Creek support patches of typical coastal sage scrub, or varying mixtures of coastal sage and chamise chaparral, while the upper slopes exhibit more homogenous chamise-black sage chaparral. Scrub formations are dominated by California sagebrush, California buckwheat, purple sage, white sage (Salvia apiana), our Lord's candle, goldenbush (Ericameria sp.), and bush mallow (Malacothamnus sp.), with an understory of non-native grasses (including schismus grass, barley and bromes), scattered patches of native melic and needle grasses, deerweed, lupine species, and wishbone bush (Mirabilis californica). Spring wildflowers observed in these sites include popcorn flower, Californica suncup (Camissonia bistorta), blue larkspur (Delphinium parryi), chia sage, farewell-to-spring (Clarkia bottae), baby blue-eyes (Nemophila menziesii), whispering bells (Emmenanthe penduliflora), wild hyacinth (Dichelostemma multiflorum), butterfly mariposa lily (Calochortus venustus), fiddleneck, and strigose lotus.

Chamise chaparral extends down to the field edges on north-facing slopes, with toyon, redberry, and scattered scrub oak in deeper draws and swales. Other species present include bush sunflower

PCR

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(Encelia californica), woolly bluecurls (Trichostema lanatum), groundsel (Senecio sp.), black sage, California sagebrush, elderberry (Sambucus sp), goldenbush, and our Lord's candle. Understory and spring wildflower species observed on burned sites include the same spectrum of native and non-native grasses and subshrubs as given above for coastal sage scrub.

METHODOLOGY

Surveys for the coastal California gnatcatcher were conducted by **PCR biologist Steve Nelson** (PRT No. 782272). Methods employed were in conformance with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Coastal California Gnatcatcher Presence/Absence Survey Protocol, revised July 28, 1997. Accordingly, a minimum of six (6) surveys were conducted at least one week apart between the hours of 0600 and 1200 nuring the breeding season. Temperatures during surveys ranged between 60 degrees Fahrenheit and 75 degrees Fahrenheit. Weather conditions were suitable for surveys with skies ranging from clear to 100 percent overcast and with winds below Beaufort scale 2. The field investigator slowly walked over the site stopping at approximately 200-foot intervals to play taped recordings of California gnatcatcher vocalizations. The tape was played for several seconds followed by a brief pause to listen for a response. Surveys were conducted on May 1, 17, 31, June 7, 14, and 21, 1998.

RESULTS

No coastal California gnatcatchers were observed or otherwise detected on site or in the adjacent areas during any of the survey efforts. On all occasions, up to twenty brown-headed cowbirds were observed within the project area. A compendium listing all bird species observed or heard on site is included as appendix A.

If you have any questions regarding the methodology or findings in this report, please do not hesitate to call.

Sincerely,

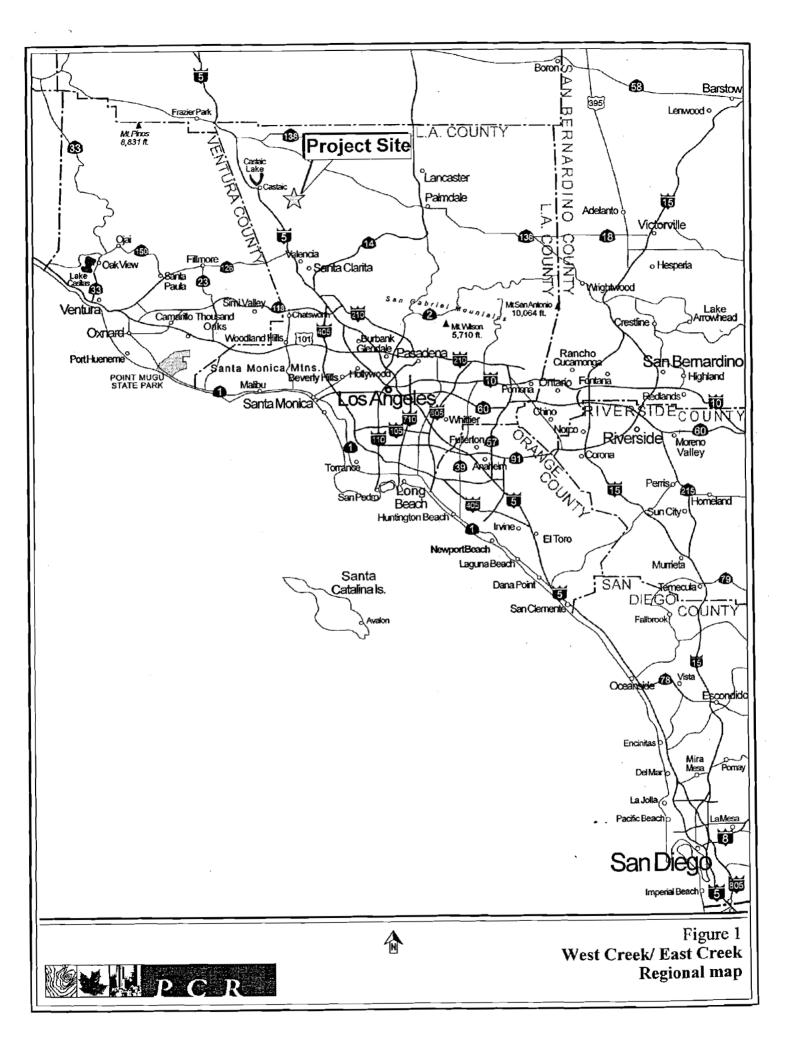
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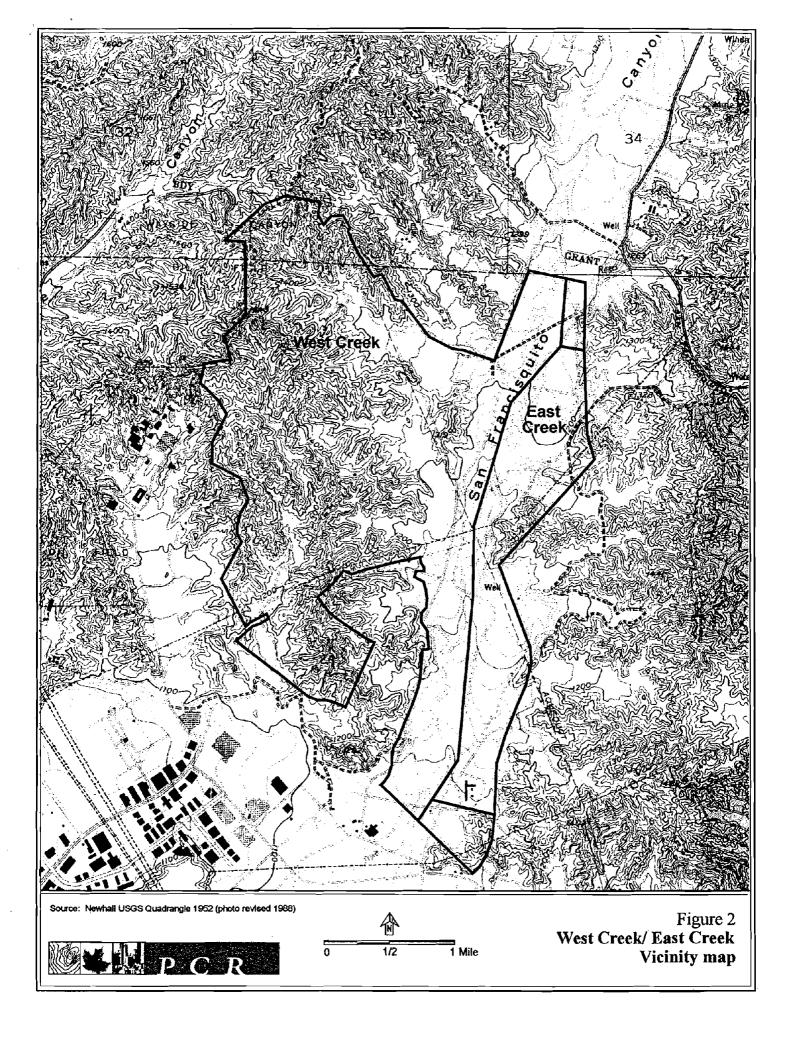
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Steven G. Nelson

Director of Biological Services

cc: Mr. Robert McMurry; Nossaman, Guthner, Knox & Elliott





APPENDIX A. ORNITHOLOGICAL COMPENDIUM

BIRDS		
Scientific Name	Common Name	Status
Accipitridae	Hawks	
Buteo jamaicensis	red-tailed hawk	
Falconidae	Falcons	,
Falco sparverius	American kestrel	***************************************
Phasianidae	Pheasants and Quails	
Callipepla californica	California quail	***************************************
Charadriidae	Plovers	
Charadrius vociferus	killdeer	***************************************
Columbidae	Pigeons and Doves	
* Columba livia	rock dove	
Zenaida macroura	mourning dove	***************************************
Cuculidae	Cuckoos and Roadrunners	
Geococcyx californianus	greater roadrunner	
Apodidae	Swifts	
Aeronautes saxatalis	white-throated swift	***************************************
Trochilidae	Hummingbirds	
Calypte anna	Anna's hummingbird	***************************************
Picidae	Woodpeckers	
Picoides nuttallii	Nuttall's woodpecker	
Colaptes auratus	northern flicker	
Tyrannidae	Tyrant Flycatchers	
Sayornis nigricans	black phoebe	•
Myiarchus cinerascens	ash-throated flycatcher	
Tyrannus verticalis	western kingbird	***************************************
Alaudidae	Larks	
Eremophila alpestris	horned lark	
Hirundinidae	Swallows	
Tachycineta thalassina	violet-green swallow	
Stelgidopteryx serripennis	northern rough-winged swallow	
Hirundo pyrrhonota	cliff swallow	
Hirundo rustica	barn swallow	• -
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^{*} Non-native

BIRDS			
Scientific Name	Common Name	Status	
Corvidae	Jays and Crows		
Aphelocoma coerulescens	scrub jay		
Corvus brachyrhynchos	American crow		
Corvus corax	common raven	pqq pq > 20 0 A h u q	
Aegithalidae	Bushtits		
Psaltriparus minimus	bushtit	***************************************	
Troglodytidae	Wrens		
Thryomanes bewickii	Bewick's wren		
Muscicapidae	Kinglets, Gnatcatchers, Thr	Kinglets, Gnatcatchers, Thrushes, and Babblers	
Turdus migratorius	American robin		
Chamaea fasciata	wrentit	wrentit	
Sialia mexicana	western bluebird	western bluebird	
Mimidae	Thrashers		
Mimus polyglottos	northern mockingbird		
Toxostoma redivivum	California thrasher		
Laniidae	Shrikes	Shrikes	
Lanius ludovicianus	loggerhead shrike		
Sturnidae	Starlings		
* Sturnus vulgaris	European starling		
Emberizidae	Wood Warblers, Tanagers, Blackbirds	Wood Warblers, Tanagers, Buntings, and	
Dendroica coronata	yellow-rumped warbler		
Wilsonia pusilla	Wilson's warbler	Wilson's warbler	
Pheucticus melanocephalus	black-headed grosbeak	black-headed grosbeak	
Pipilo crissalis	California towhee	California towhee	
Pipilo erythrophthalmus	spotted towhee	spotted towhee	
Aimophila ruficeps	rufous-crowned sparrow	rufous-crowned sparrow	
Pooecetes gramineus	vesper sparrow	vesper sparrow	
Chondestes grammacus	lark sparrow	lark sparrow	
Amphispiza belli	sage sparrow	sage sparrow	
Agelaius phoeniceus	red-winged blackbird	red-winged blackbird	
Sturnella neglecta	western meadowlark	western meadowlark	
Euphagus cyanocephalus	Brewer's blackbird	Brewer's blackbird	
Molothrus ater	brown-headed cowbird	brown-headed cowbird	
Icterus galbula	northern oriole		

^{*} Non-native

Common Name	Status
Finches	
house finch	
lesser goldfinch	
	house finch

^{*} Non-native